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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001313

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SUBJECT: LOWER HOUSE SPEAKER LAUNCHES NATIONAL TREND PARTY

REF: A. AMMAN 857

[1](#)B. 08 AMMAN 2941

[1](#)C. 08 AMMAN 2585

[1](#)D. 08 AMMAN 2337

[1](#)E. 08 AMMAN 1446

[1](#)F. 07 AMMAN 4885

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Lower House Speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali officially launched the pro-establishment National Trend Party on May 30. While many in Jordan support the idea of a party to counterbalance the influence of Islamists, deep skepticism remains about Majali's ability to effectively lead the effort. The party's ideology and leadership structure remain vague, and many MPs see it as a last-ditch attempt to revive Majali's fading political fortunes in parliament. Others question his ability to effectively woo the political establishment. End Summary.

National Trend Party Launched

[1](#)2. (SBU) Lower House Speaker Abdulhadi Al-Majali officially launched the National Trend Party (Hizb Al-Tayyar Al-Watani) in a large ceremony at the Dead Sea on May 30. Majali first announced the formation of the party in May 2008, but has put off officially inaugurating its operations for more than a year due to changing political winds and a lack of financial support (Refs A-E). Fifty-six members of parliament attended the ceremony, along with over 1700 well-wishers and adherents. Contacts within the Ministry of Interior tell us that the party has filed all of its paperwork with and is now officially licensed by the GOJ.

Skepticism About The Party's Impact

[1](#)3. (C) Our contacts and media commentary support the idea of a large pro-government political movement, but see the National Trend Party as fundamentally flawed in its conception and leadership. Majali's detractors are quick to point out that the Jordanian electorate has long been skeptical about the value of political parties and is unlikely to support a new effort created from an existing parliamentary bloc rather than a grassroots constituency. Many commentators are calling the party's launch a good first step, but one that must be followed up quickly with a fleshing out of the its political ideology and leadership structure. Some are already faulting Majali for launching the party without a fully-formed organization or clear policy positions.

[1](#)4. (C) The National Trend Party's launch only served to highlight its lack of a clear ideology. Contacts are characterizing the party as broadly nationalist, center-right, and pro-government, but it is clear that little thought has been given to how this will translate into votes on specific bills in parliament. An official party manifesto has reportedly been drawn up, but it has not yet been

distributed for public and media consumption. The lack of a coherent ideology is fueling criticism that the National Trend is a one-dimensional party that revolves around Majali rather than the issues that impact the lives of ordinary Jordanians.

15. (C) While the party has yet to formally select its leadership, it is clear that Majali will be its chairman. In order to avoid the appearance of a personality party, media commentators are urging Majali to place time limits on his tenure in the chairman slot and surround himself with a strong corps of deputies as proof that he is building something that will outlive his own political career. Contacts within the party have long expressed similar feelings. They fear that Majali has not learned the lessons of his previous two failed attempts at forming a political party, both of which languished when they failed to develop a constituency beyond the Speaker's small group of allies. Majali floated the idea of a rotating chairmanship early on, but there has been little recent talk of the party's leadership structure.

The Impact in Parliament

16. (C) The party's formation comes at a time when Majali is facing increasingly bold challenges to his leadership position in parliament, causing many observers to see the move as an attempt to shore up waning support. In several recent columns and newspaper stories, MPs and pundits have highlighted Majali's inability to bring harmony to the legislature. This comes on the heels of (unsubstantiated)

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talk that the government is seeking Majali's ouster in favor of a speaker who commands more respect from parliamentarians -- a figure such as former speaker Sa'ad Srouf. Privately, many MPs who are ostensible Majali supporters tell us that the 75 year old's time has passed, and that it is time for a younger leader to emerge. Opposition MP Bassem Hadadin has characterized the formation of Majali's party as an act of desperation and predicted that it would fold by the end of the year.

17. (C) Majali's political position within the parliament may be weakening, but he is still the speaker and commands a theoretical majority (assuming that he can maintain party discipline). The new party presents many of Majali's ostensible followers in the parliament with a difficult decision: join a personality-based political party in exchange for short-term spoils in the current parliament or remain independent of any political affiliation and risk alienation from parliament's current power structure. Majali has a handful of die-hard supporters in parliament, but most of the MPs he claims as part of his bloc may prove reluctant to attach themselves to what they see as Majali's fading political fortunes. Many have told us that they will vote with Majali's bloc on the floor, but will not become formal members of his party.

Will the State Support It?

18. (C) The *raison d'etre* of the National Trend Party is its pro-establishment stance. Influential Al-Ghad commentator Mohammed Abu Rumman theorized in a May 31 article that "the success and sustainability of the party will be based on its relations with the government and not the ideas adopted by its members." Yet it remains unclear whether the political establishment and the government will validate the party's goals through either implicit or explicit support.

19. (C) Majali has placed the political establishment in a difficult position. While the elite see the value in actively supporting a pro-government party (Ref F), they have deep reservations about Majali at its helm. The popular

perception is that Majali's party is merely a tool for his own personal advancement. Many of our contacts believe that if Majali is tapped for a ministerial position, the party will quickly be abandoned.

¶10. (C) Despite their misgivings, pro-government commentators and politicians are willing to give the National Trend Party a chance. Majali's point that Jordan has ceded too much political ground to the Muslim Brotherhood-linked Islamic Action Front is well taken among the political elite. Many see the need for a pro-government party that can serve as a balance against the Islamists and a platform for nationalist political sentiment. Rumors are circulating that the General Intelligence Directorate has tacitly approved of the new party and its goal of strengthening the hand of pro-establishment East Bankers in Jordan's political debates.

¶11. (C) The clock is ticking for Majali. Analysts believe that the National Trend Party will enjoy a grace period of several months to organize and define its message. Yet founding members of the party itself have clearly told us that they will abandon Majali and his party if it becomes clear that it is coming to resemble his previous unsuccessful attempts at party building. Skepticism in the political establishment and the press will build quickly if members of the party begin to break off.
Beecroft